

European *Social* dialogue

European Commission Delegation

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FEB 18 2000

Newsletter from the European Commission - Employment and Social Affairs DG/D - November 1999

No. 11

Industrial relations & industrial change

Edito

On 8 September 1999, the Commission adopted the "employment package" which includes the draft employment guidelines for 2000, the draft joint report on Member States' employment policy in 1999 and recommendations to the Member States on how to improve their employment policy performance. Coherence, continuity and consolidation of the Luxembourg process are the watchwords of this new "employment package"(*). The innovative element in the exercise is the recommendations addressed to the Member States. The Commission has identified eight priority fields in which special efforts are deemed necessary. These are designed to stimulate rather than to allocate blame or penalise in any way. They are messages of encouragement addressed to all Member States to implement more ambitious policies in pursuit of the objectives set out in the employment guidelines. The Commission is not proposing a new set of guidelines for 2000. In the interests of coherence, continuity and consolidation over a multi-annual time frame - and following contacts earlier in the year with Member States and the social partners - it has opted for a limited number of modifications to the 1999 guidelines. However, the Commission has repeated its call to the social partners to implement guideline no. 16 on work organisation as a matter of urgency. This will no doubt involve finding new balances between the social partners and efforts to achieve partnership and interaction at all levels. All the players must prepare for the Lisbon summit: the Commission, the Member States and the social partners. The latter, in particular, are expected to make a contribution of real substance.

Odile Quintin
Acting Deputy Director General,
Employment and Social Affairs DG

(* http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/key_en.htm)

The main story

Commerce: respect for rights by workers and employers

Following several months of negotiations, EuroCommerce (employers) and Euro-FIET (unions) have just signed an important agreement on fundamental rights and principles at work. The aim is to improve social standards worldwide.

In signing this agreement, the social partners are seeking to make their contribution to the innovative measures designed to promote fundamental rights at the workplace at international level. They recognise that, although large companies are able to apply more direct measures than SMEs, at the end of the day the only way to avoid a commerce in manufactured goods which violates fundamental labour standards is by ensuring that the same global objectives apply to all companies.

The text includes the principles laid down in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration of 18 June 1998. EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET recommend their members to actively encourage companies and workers in the European commerce sector to respect the fundamental rights laid down in the ILO Conventions⁽¹⁾. They also want their members to draw up their own codes of conduct for trade relations with third countries. Specifically, this means eliminating any form of forced or obligatory labour, the effective abolition of any form of child labour, the elimination of discrimination at work, freedom of association and the recognition of the right to collective agreements.

At the "social dialogue" plenary meeting of 29 September 1999, the social partners agreed to decide on the status and practical implementation of this agreement as well as the most appropriate actions to ensure it is as widely disseminated and respected as possible.

(1) ILO Conventions nos. 29 and 105 on forced labour, no. 138 on child labour, no. 111 on non-discrimination in the field of employment, nos. 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective agreements.

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Employment & social affairs

CEE: V/39



European Commission

“Combating discrimination together”

On 26 May 1999 the social partners came together for the first time to debate the important subject of discrimination. Ms Quintin stressed how discrimination is a fundamental point of the Treaty and a challenge in building a democratic Europe.

Under Article 13 of the Treaty, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. In this connection, the Commission has prepared a series of proposals and set up consultations with the various players.

The Commission's approach is based both on respecting and guaranteeing rights (legislative aspect) and concrete actions aimed at changing attitudes ("programme" aspect). Three instruments are therefore planned:

- a proposal for a horizontal directive covering the main points in the areas of employment and working conditions;
- a proposal for a specific directive based on race or ethnic origin which extends beyond employment (social protection and social security, social benefits, education, access to goods and services, etc.);
- a proposal for a programme aimed at promoting analysis, the exchange of experience and good practice, and subsidiarity in the

fight against discrimination.

Certain themes came in for particular attention during the debates, such as the matter of subsidiarity, the "gaps" to fill (UNICE), the relation between legislation and changes in mentalities (UNICE), the unequal progress in the various forms of discrimination (ETUC), and the problem of "objective and reasonable justification" in the case of discrimination on the basis of age (FERPA).

Ms Quintin considered that, as Article 13 has an explicit political purpose, specific action aimed at guaranteeing these rights would be an appropriate political response. She gave the example of equal opportunities where a change in the law preceded a change in mentalities. National legislation on subsidiarity differs and this can constitute an obstacle to the internal market and the mobility of workers and other persons. In the field of discrimination, progress has varied depending on the field - questions relating to age and sex, for example, have evolved more quickly than on religion or sexual orientation. Hence the importance of framework legislation in which definitions are decided at national

level. The Commission's approach is to affirm the principle of equal treatment and then to provide for different treatment in certain cases (retirement age for example).

Finally, a number of possibilities were raised in regard to actions in cooperation with the social partners. The ETUC proposed a joint declaration on discrimination at the workplace, a reappraisal of the 1995 joint statement on racism and an evaluation of experiences at the workplace and the transfer of good practices between enterprises. UNICE asked whether initiatives by the social partners could replace proposals for a directive, especially in the field of employment.

CEEP suggested organising a seminar that would bring together researchers and the social partners in order to work on the subject of discrimination. Ms Quintin said that she would very much welcome initiatives from the social partners and assured them of the Commission's support.

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The implications of telework

The economic and social implications, legislative responses, case studies... were all discussed on 9 June at a very lively meeting of social partners from various sectors.

Do the social partners see it as their role, at national and European level, to ensure promotion of the principle of equal opportunity when modernising and adapting the legal and contractual framework? In the spirit of the conclusions of the Vienna mini-summit, do they agree that it is essential to include telework in the follow-up to the Commission communication on the organisation of work? Do they believe that the adaptability pillar should support telework and that a specific guideline (based on the contribution of the social partners) should be planned for 2001? All these questions were asked at the outset of the first cross-sectoral seminar on telework.

In order to define more specifically the implications of telework, studies carried out by Mr Koehler for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions were presented. Mr Brandl, of the German Postal Services Union (Deutsche Postgewerkschaft), analysed a collective agreement concluded between his organisation and Deutsche Telekom AG management, while Mr Straube

related his experiences at the companies Globus Graphics and Quadriga. These examples raised many questions, in particular on training and the isolation of teleworkers (how to maintain contact with colleagues and the company culture?) or the fact that no one could be required to do telework. Mr Villeneuve (CEEP) presented the framework agreement covering teleworkers employed by Danish local authorities. He stressed the need to strike a balance between three worlds - work, the family and leisure activities - traditionally seen as separate. He also expressed the desire for a meeting on the theme of telework attended by researchers and the social partners.

Mr Buschak (ETUC) asked about guarantees for security and protection, and also the tax aspects. Ms de Liedekerke (UNICE) raised the matter of the definition of telework.

In conclusion, Ms Quintin summarised a number of points for future deliberations:

- a positive approach to the development of telework as a factor of change;
- the importance of exchange of information

and good practice;

- points on which joint work could be envisaged:
 - a) the voluntary nature of the agreements and the need for mutual trust between employer and teleworker;
 - b) the challenges in the social and legislative fields (isolation, psychological profile of teleworkers, equal opportunities);
 - c) cross-border aspects, taxation, and health and safety;
 - d) the interdependence of telework, organisation of work and technological change.

The social partners agreed to continue their analysis of the phenomenon of telework. Some of the questions asked were with a view to the forthcoming European Council meeting in Portugal.

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Agriculture

Seminars held in Bonn (Germany) and Svendborg (Denmark), as part of the ARE project, successfully identified good practices in vocational training. The social partners are currently preparing a White Paper and a conference on employment in the agricultural sector (December 1999).

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Banks

A major conference on competition from non-banking institutions will be held in Brussels on 18 November 1999, at which a report on this new development will be presented. See the next issue of our newsletter for further details.

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Construction

In the framework of social dialogue, the social partners have set up a working group on vocational and continuing training. The group has assessed a number of projects drawn up either jointly or in close cooperation with the Commission's Enterprise, Employment and Social Affairs, and Education and Culture DGs. It has also submitted two LEONARDO projects and a number of other studies on vocational training in the construction sector.

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Private security

Improving the award of public contracts

"Selecting best value – a manual for public authorities awarding contracts for guarding security services"... The social partners (CoESS and Euro-FIET) are keen to ensure that this guide receives the

widest possible dissemination throughout the EU Member States.

Produced in cooperation with ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd and with the support of the European Commission, this guide is designed for contracting authorities seeking to choose a security guard services provider which combines quality with a competitive price, rather than simply accepting the lowest offer. It aims to provide them with a practical tool with which to protect users' interests by better defining the type and location of security services they need. By more precisely defining their own requirements the contracting authorities will in future be able to select a tenderer not only on the basis of a competitive price but also on the basis of its know-how and ability to provide a reliable service of a high standard. CoESS and Euro-FIET want to improve the awareness of European and national public authorities as clients of public contracts. But how? By informing them of the benefits that a more quality-focused selection can generate not only for themselves as clients but also, in the longer term, for the private security sector as a whole.

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Open Forum

Fabiana PIERINI,
EFCI permanent
representative



The European Federation of Cleaning Industries (EFCI) represents, through its 13 national associations, a sector of over 50,000 enterprises and 2.5 million workers in Europe.

A concrete and effective social dialogue

The EFCI represents a very labour-intensive and fast-changing services sector. Over the past decade a record of sustained growth is estimated to have generated new jobs at the average rate of 5% a year.

As a partner in social dialogue since 1992, the EFCI attaches the utmost importance to professionalising and structuring the industry in Europe and is convinced that the joint reflection it has undertaken with its trade union partner Euro-FIET is a key element in defining European action within this strategy.

Social issues and working conditions are of central importance to a services sector like ours and they account for a large part of our activities. Vocational training, the ability to adapt, and the development of new sources of jobs in certain niche areas within the industry (domestic cleaning, for example), are all key questions on which we have decided to work in a spirit of European partnership.

Much has already been achieved. Since the 1995 joint guidelines on vocational training, we have seen five European proposals on the training of cleaning personnel. 1996 also brought a major initiative on new sources of jobs in the cleaning sector, with the signing of the first agreement of this kind at European level. Today, the sector's social partners and national public authorities regularly attend round table discussions in all EU countries on possible forms of support for the development of these services for private individuals.

Our action in this field is guided by one major concern: the need for concrete and effective action. We believe European sectoral social dialogue has an important role to play in promoting and developing the various branches of the European economy. But we also believe that in order to achieve this, social dialogue must above all remain concrete and rooted in reality. We must be able to work intelligently and realistically in order to provide a coherent and responsible answer to the needs of the sector's companies, which we represent, and workers, while respecting national specificity and the principle of subsidiarity. Over the years, the EFCI and its European social partner have shown proof of this realism and ability to work together in the field.

Europe is the creation of its citizens, as its economic strength is the product of its companies. The role of our European organisations is to support them in their development and to assist policy-makers in creating the necessary conditions for their growth as a precondition for stable social and economic progress.



The guide is also available in French and German.

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Personal services – Hairdressing

A mature social dialogue...

It is without doubt the number of projects under way or in the pipeline which provides the most visible proof that relations between Euro-FIET (unions) and CIC-Europe (employers) are now entering a new phase of maturity.

One of the most recent to acquire a European dimension, social dialogue in the personal services sector now seems to be well and truly

established. It is currently bringing together employers' and workers' representatives from the hairdressing sector, with regular meetings in Brussels attended by many national representatives of Euro-FIET and CIC-Europe.

A project drawn up under the Leonardo da Vinci programme has just been completed. This sets out the sector guidelines for vocational training and defines the diplomas linked to various levels of training and qualification. The social partners are seeking to launch a project to inform all the interested partners at national level to explain how the results obtained can be implemented. Another Leonardo project relating to work-linked training is set to start up shortly.

A specific working group is currently looking at ways of developing European exchange programmes for hairdressing students and trainees. A survey is soon to be conducted with a view to setting the priorities for future action in the

field of social dialogue. Another survey will look at future needs and trends in the field of vocational training in particular and employment in general. The social partners will also be looking at the possibility of opening up their dialogue to related professions.

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Multisectoral

Europe's Ageing Workforce – Employability and Productivity

If employment participation among older workers in Europe was in line with the US, an additional 10 million Europeans would be employed. The challenge is to increase the number of people aged 55 and over remaining at work. This will become ever more important in the light of the most important demographic shift of modern times: a workforce that is not only getting older, but also shrinking.

This was the message delivered by both Allan Larsson, Director General of the Employment and Social Affairs DG, and Odile Quintin, his Acting Deputy Director General, at the 9th European Human Resource Directors' Conference in Stockholm on 9-10 September, hosted by the Swedish Employers' Confederation, SAF. In his concluding speech, Mr Larsson challenged the idea that older workers should leave the labour market to make way for younger workers as not borne out by the facts. A low employment rate for people over 55 does not correlate with high employment rates for the young. There is no simple trade-off between the generations in terms of jobs. The facts and trends in the Joint Employment Report fully confirm that demographic change must be a matter of common concern.

Ms Quintin, opening the conference and chairing the plenary sessions, connected public policies in favour of older workers to employment strategy. She underlined the importance of life-long learning and access to training by older workers in giving them the opportunity to update their qualifications and to adapt to rapid technological change. She also pointed to the social partners as having a special role to play in finding new forms of work in order to

facilitate the integration of older workers. Finally, she underlined the importance of other Commission activities such as the recent communications on active ageing and social protection and the forthcoming directive on discrimination.

All speakers at the plenary sessions, including Professor Alan Walker of Sheffield University and Mr Anders Scharp, President of SAF, agreed on the need for a partnership approach, aimed at reconciling age and productivity, whether by reconsidering early retirement schemes, developing learning activities or introducing flexible work arrangements. Mr Scharp and others also expressed reservations about an anti-discrimination directive including age.

Twelve examples of actions for older workers were presented, all of which reiterated the message of partnership. In one company, a "competence insurance" permitted older employees to upgrade their skills, without loss of earnings. In other companies, age-conscious personnel policies had been introduced in order to retain older staff until pensionable age. Such policies included "Senior Clubs", extra days off for older workers, or part-time work. Open communication and an active involvement of the employees prove vital in changing existing habits.

Instead of retiring their workers, other companies, in the process of restructuring, offered their workers a secondment to the non-profit sector. Results showed that 2/3 of the employees who took this option found a new job.

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European Social Dialogue

Newsletter from the European Commission
 Employment and Social Affairs DG/D

- **Published by:**
*Employment and Social Affairs DG/D.1,
 European Commission*
 Fax: +32-2 299 24 66
- The *European Social Dialogue* newsletter can be consulted on the Internet in the various language versions, at the following address:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/soc-dial/social/index_en.htm